

COMMUNITY UPDATE

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McKenna to scrutinize County 2002 Budget

In October the County Executive will deliver a proposed 2002 budget, and it will be my job as Chair of the County Council's Budget Committee to scrutinize the budget for every possible saving and efficiency.

Property Taxes



Before I came to the County Council in 1996 it had been the policy of the County Executive, for a quarter century, to request the maximum property tax revenue increase allowed under state law.

From 1985-95, for example, King County increased its property tax revenue by an average of over eight percent per year – more than doubling its property tax collections in that period. The resulting increases in the property tax bills of individual property owners, many of whom saw annual increases much higher than eight percent, were particularly burdensome for seniors on fixed incomes and young families trying to purchase their first home.

My proudest accomplishment on the County Council has been putting a stop to those automatic maximum property tax revenue increases. During each of the last four years, the county's property tax revenue increase has shrunk. Last year, the increase was less than the inflation rate. I am working to make sure that next year's budget will assume a property tax revenue increase at or below the rate of inflation.

I never forget that many property owners experience tax increases greater than the county's revenue increases, in part because the county accounts for just 15 percent of your property tax bill. Also, of course, different properties appreciate at different rates.

County Spending

King County is the second largest unit of government in the state and we spend a lot of money. The Current Expense budget of the county (where most property tax revenues go and which funds the public safety departments, the parks department and human services) will amount to over \$500 million next year. The combined budgets of every county agency – including Metro Transit and our Wastewater Division, which provides the sewage treatment for the county – will amount to about \$2.5 billion in 2002.

We have a big job to do every year, but this upcoming budget process could be the most challenging in King County's history.

Bad decisions from the past are coming back to haunt the county. A financial software replacement program that was supposed to be fully operational last year was abandoned after expending \$40 million because the executive agencies responsible simply couldn't manage the program.



Early in the 1990's a political decision was made to open up a brand new county jail in Kent even though it was clear that running two separate jails (in Seattle and Kent) would create inefficiencies and duplications in management and overhead.

Overall, in the Current Expense budget, the county's expenses have been increasing twice as fast as its revenues. In part, this is due to successful efforts to reduce the growth in property tax revenues. But the larger factors are annual salary and wage expenses that are projected to grow six percent annually for the next three years, and employee benefit costs that will grow an average 15 percent a year. In short, our expenses are eating us alive, financially.

Town Meetings

October 18, 2001

7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Newport Library

14250 SE Newport Way, Bellevue

October 25, 2001

7:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Mercer Island Library

4400 88th Ave. SE, Mercer Island

Please see back page for more details

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County's Budget for 2002: Scrutinizing Our Priorities

(Continued from front page)

Priorities and Public Input

The easy choice would be to make taxpayers pay for the mistakes and excess of county government by simply raising property and other taxes to whatever level is necessary. I don't consider that an acceptable option. I believe the ultimate solution is for county government to become smarter and more efficient.

We must prioritize our budget and never forget that our most important job as a county is to maintain public safety through agencies like the County Sheriff's Office and Prosecuting Attorney's Office, keep the courts and jails operating, and fund basic human services that serve our most vulnerable residents.

Public hearings on the County Executive's proposed budget will be held throughout the county in October and my committee will be accepting testimony through November 19 via letters and e-mails.



I look forward to hearing your comments, and I urge you to take the time to participate in a budget process that will impact both your property tax bill and the level of public safety services that residents of our county will receive.

Preserving the environment and protecting religious freedom

In the last few months there have been many headlines regarding the County Council's efforts to balance the need for environmental protections with the need to allow churches and schools to serve the residents of rural King County. There has been a heated debate here at the Council and several votes on proposed ordinances. The fundamental question involved has been: Do we allow churches and schools to expand and construct new facilities to serve the people living in the rural area?

In examining this issue the Council made substantial progress in identifying key issues and common goals. Several Councilmembers, religious leaders and school representatives (both public and private) spent hours working through the goals, one by one, to identify possible ways to achieve and adopt higher environmental standards without effectively barring new churches and schools in rural King County, as had been proposed by the County Executive.

Supportive Councilmembers challenged the schools and churches to document their facility needs, consulted with community representatives, and met with outside experts on surface water and sustainable development. Although they chose not to attend these meetings, the County Executive, dissenting Councilmembers and environmental groups received copies of minutes, draft language and invitations to all meetings. The door was always open and even the press was invited to attend.



Do we allow churches and schools to expand and construct new facilities to serve the people living in the rural area?

The ordinance ultimately adopted by the Council and later vetoed by the County Executive was strongly supported by the church and school leaders with whom we worked. It would have included the following environmental protections:

- A site limit of 10% impervious surfaces, and the retention of native vegetation on 65% of the site, for churches over 25,000 sq. ft. The standard now, because of the Executive's veto, will be 40% impervious surface allowed and no native vegetative cover requirement.
- Utilizing captured and recycled water for non-drinking needs like flushing toilets, landscaping and fire suppression.
- A transportation-demand management plan for new high schools to reduce the number of car trips.
- Annual workshops and a Task Force sponsored by the County to share the most current state-of-the-art building practices to achieve higher environmental standards.

Unfortunately, because of the County Executive's veto, the effort to build more environmentally sensible structures in the rural area has come to naught. I am hopeful that sometime in the future enough Councilmembers will step forward to pass the ordinance by a large enough margin to withstand a veto. Until then, we'll just have to make do with the current rules.

You can view the vetoed ordinance in its entirety at: www.metrokc.gov/mkcc/Members/d6/.

Eastside Communities to get new bus service

This September, both Metro and Sound Transit Regional Express will increase bus service on the Eastside. More than 70,000 hours of new Metro service will be made available, primarily because of resources freed up by Sound Transit investments. Some of the service will be completely new. Other service improvements will involve increased frequency or hours of service on existing routes. The following principles are guiding the fall service changes:

- Improve rush-hour service to Eastside employment centers and downtown Seattle.
- Provide all-day, two-way express service between Issaquah and Seattle.
- Run buses more often and for longer hours connecting Overlake with Eastside activity centers and regional transit service.
- Provide all-day service in areas that now have only rush-hour service.

Examples of new service that will make it easier to get around the Eastside or to downtown Seattle:

- **Route 232** - New two-way express service between downtown Redmond and downtown Bellevue.
- **Route 240** - Will now operate every 30 minutes between Bellevue and Renton.
- **Route 245** - New service connecting the Eastgate Park & Ride lot with Bellevue Community College, Lake Hills and Crossroads Mall.
- **Route 247** - Reinstatement of service between Overlake and Boeing facilities in Renton/Kent.
- **Sound Transit Route 554** - New all-day express connection from Issaquah to downtown Seattle on I-90, with stops at Eastgate and on Mercer Island.
- **Sound Transit Route 555** - New rush-hour service between Issaquah, the U.W. and Northgate along I-90, Interstate 405, State Route 520 and Interstate 5, with a stop at the Bellevue Transit Center.

This fall's service changes started on September 29; timetables became available on September 19. For additional information regarding either Metro or Sound Transit service, call Metro Customer Rider Information at: (206) 553-3000.

Finding solutions to fix I-405: Four Alternatives Evaluated

For the past 18 months, I've served as vice-chair of WSDOT's I-405 Project Executive Committee. With the grim state of transportation here in Puget Sound, I'm pleased to report that we're moving ahead with real solutions to improve the I-405 corridor.



The I-405 project covers the corridor from Lynnwood in Snohomish County down to Kent via SR 167 in the south. It has experienced a nearly 200 percent increase in traffic congestion over the past ten years. I-405/SR 167 and SR 520 lead the region in daily hours of congestion – they are

gridlocked more than half of each weekday from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Today it takes 56 minutes to travel from Bellevue to Kent during rush hour. This trip is projected to take 79 minutes by 2020.

Recently, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) unveiled the results of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement which evaluated four alternatives. The Preliminary Preferred Alternative is a truly multimodal investment package.

It would add two additional general purpose lanes in each direction where needed, reconfigure interchanges to maximize traffic flow, and improve arterials to create better freeway access.

To improve transit speed and reliability, this alternative envisions direct freeway-to-freeway HOV connections that will take buses, van and carpools out of general purpose traffic. An additional one million hours of bus service would be added above today's levels, utilizing a high-capacity bus rapid transit system.

The potential price tag for the entire package could be \$7 billion spread over 10 to 20 years, assuming voter approval. This estimate includes millions for environmental protection such as surface water runoff treatment and stream enhancements. Overall, the project would reduce air and water pollution below today's levels from I-405 as it now exists.

Doing nothing with I-405 is not an option and we must continue moving forward. WSDOT is holding public hearings on the alternatives during September, and the committee will decide this October which alternatives to advance to a final EIS. I encourage all Eastside residents to study the alternatives and weigh in during the public comment period.

For more information on the I-405 project, call my office at (206) 296-1006, or log onto the I-405 website at: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/I-405/>

Town Hall

Meet with King County Councilmember Rob McKenna

Please join us:

Topics we will discuss:

- King County Budget
- Human Services - County Executive proposed cuts
- Transportation - I-405

October 18, 2001

7:00 to 8:30 p.m. at the Newport Library
14250 SE Newport Way, Bellevue, WA

Also speaking:

Bellevue Mayor Chuck Mosher

October 25, 2001

7:00 to 8:30 p.m. at the Mercer Island Library
4400 88th Ave. SE, Mercer Island, WA

Also speaking:

Mercer Island Councilmember Sven Goldmanis



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Important community update